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# The Princeton Theological Review

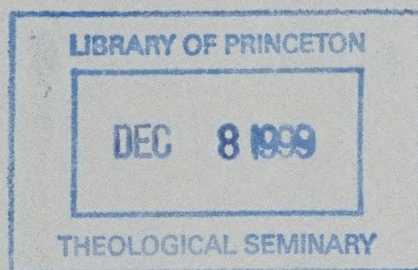
*a journal by students of Princeton Theological Seminary*

Published by the Charles Hodge Society

Volume 5 • Number 1 • February 1998

*that the light of God's truth may shine bright and increase*

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*Stand at the crossroads and look  
Ask for the old paths, where the good way is  
Walk in it, and find rest for your souls*

JEREMIAH 6:16



# The Princeton Theological Review

Dedicated to the Rev. Dr. Charles Hodge (1797-1878)

Professor of Systematic Theology, Princeton Theological Seminary

## Executive Editor JAY WESLEY RICHARDS

SBN 372, P. O. Box 5204, Princeton Theological Seminary, Princeton, NJ 08543 email: 372jwr@ptsmail.ptsem.edu

## Managing Editor ELISABETH ROBERTSON KENNEDY

SBN 516, P. O. Box 5204, Princeton Theological Seminary, Princeton, NJ 08543 email: 516elk@ptsmail.ptsem.edu

## Arts and Culture Editor JONATHON S. BRENNER

SBN 312, P. O. Box 5204, Princeton Theological Seminary, Princeton, NJ 08543 email: 357jsb@ptsmail.ptsem.edu

## Book Review Editor THOMAS VITO AIUTO

SBN 053, P. O. Box 5204, Princeton Theological Seminary, Princeton, NJ 08543 email: 053tva@ptsmail.ptsem.edu

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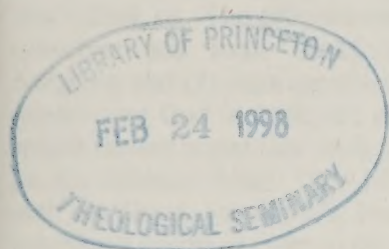
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## From the Editors

In honor of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr's birthday and Black History Month, and out of concern for the racial incidents that occurred last semester at Princeton Theological Seminary and that continue to occur at universities around the country, we at the PTR would like to reaffirm the biblical vision of unity that should define those of us that together make up the body of Christian believers. We salute the achievements of Black Americans and in particular all the Black seminarians, who have brought and continue to bring so many gifts and blessings to the seminary and to the Christian Church as a whole. We at the PTR would also like to reaffirm our interest in minority participation in the writing and editing of our journal. We seek individuals from all parts of the seminary community, who share our commitment to Christian orthodoxy and the historic creeds. We are convinced that there is a particular need for our vision on the seminary campus at this point in history.

We believe that the gospel is the most radical and liberating message that the world has known, and that this gospel should continue to be the cherished proclamation of the Church, which is one body made up of many diverse parts, unified under our Lord and head—Jesus Christ—and held together by the bond of the Holy Spirit. We rejoice in our differences, be they ethnic, racial, gender, or individual qualities. There is no doubt that these differences provide have provided an invaluable richness to our Christian heritage. Yet we affirm that we are not primarily defined by these differences. Rather, we are essentially defined by our faith in God made possible through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. It is “in him [that

we] live and move and have our being.” (Acts 17:28) God has created each of us uniquely and for his good purpose, and he is also the one who has redeemed us on the cross. He is responsible for our differences and our similarities, and thus he alone is the one who truly defines us. To focus principally upon that which divides us, be it our individual differences, or the history of those actions which have served to separate rather than unite (the racial atrocities of American slavery and the Holocaust come to mind) denies the truth that we are called to be “one body . . . made to drink of one Spirit.” (I Corinthians 12:13)

We deplore the racial incidents that have occurred on our campus, and we pray that the seminary community can truly come together in unity and in love as our savior has commanded us, so that we might be a witness to the surrounding community and the world. When part of the body of Christian believers suffers, we all suffer as a result. Some have said that forgiveness does not come cheap, and we must agree. Our Savior humbled himself even unto death on a cross, so that we might be reconciled with the Father, even while we were still enemies of God because of our sins. Let us follow his example and humble ourselves before our brothers and sisters in Christ. We are even called to love our enemies and to pray for them. Let us not be content with the ways that the world defines us as individuals or as racial types, but instead let us be a witness to the better way that Christ has to offer. For if we fail to love our brothers and sisters in Christ, then we fail to love God.

**PTR**

Man, in all ages and all nations of the earth, is the same. Man is a peculiar creature—he is the image of his God, though he may be subjected to the most wretched condition upon earth, yet the spirit and feeling which constitute the creature, man, can never be entirely erased from his breast, because the God who made him after his own image, planted it in his heart; he cannot get rid of it.

*David Walker's Appeal*



# Correspondence

Dear Jay and friends,

Thank you for another issue of the *PTR* which has provided food for thought. I particularly enjoyed Adam Neder's article about Hodge, Warfield, and Darwinism. It was an area that I did not know much about, and his presentation was consistently interesting and illuminating.

However, I was disappointed by the statement in the last paragraph of your editorial, "The Proposed Revision to Amendment B: We Stand at a Crossroads," that the church should "end debate" on the issue of whether homosexual sex in any circumstances is sin. You have clearly stated your reasons for believing that it is sin, and you have published articles in the past on this issue. I do agree that the wording of the proposed amendment is vague, and if considered as a solution it glosses over important theological issues. But I think that the need for

***The reason for defending freedom in biblical interpretation is not for the sake of freedom of private conscience but for the sake of a free Bible and thus, ultimately, for the sake of God's freedom to correct us.***

continuing debate on this issue comes from tensions within Scripture itself—not with regard to explicit references to homosexual sex, but with regard to *how God is to be obeyed through Scripture*. Therefore, I think that debate on this issue should not be terminated, regardless of the outcome of the vote on the amendment.

In what follows I will state my case that (1) there is tension in Scripture regarding how to obey God through Scripture; (2) cutting apart this tension or glossing over it can lead to one of three kinds of theological shallowness, none of which is desirable for the church; (3) the main deciding point between Christian reformist and traditionalist positions on homosexual sex is the question of whether there is a biblical mandate to believe that God's will is everywhere and always against it; and (4) there still remain different challenges for how the church is to minister faithfully to homosexual people and the wider society if one or the other position is taken.

My intent throughout is to be as fair as possible to both sides and not push my own reformist position (which I will describe more completely below). As one who has been nurtured in PC(USA) congregations favoring the reformist position, and who also has many

theological mentors who hold the traditionalist position, the question at the top of my mind is, "What sort of hermeneutic am I using to believe this reformist position, and what problems might it lead me into? Why do so many people whom I otherwise find theologically sound believe the traditionalist position, and what would I have to believe to change my position?" I hope that reformists and traditionalists alike can benefit from my deliberations.

1. *Obedience to authority in Scripture*. One can clarify the contours of the debate by comparing the work of Darrell Fasching and Karl Barth. Fasching (in his books *Narrative Theology after Auschwitz* and *The Ethical Challenge of Auschwitz and Hiroshima*) believes that biblical traditions contain an ethic of faithfulness as "chutzpah": questioning God on the basis of God's prior promises. Among Fasching's sources are Abraham's asking God if he will destroy Sodom if a certain number of righteous people are found in it (Gen. 18); Jacob's wrestling with God at the Jabbok ford (Gen. 32); and the fact that in the book of Job it is Job, who protested at God, who in the end is rewarded by God, instead of Job's friends, who said that Job must have done something wrong. The structure of chutzpah, as Fasching advocates it, is not an arbitrary questioning but a daring defense of human dignity in the face of authority. Even God may be questioned in the name of human dignity without stepping outside of faithfulness to God, because each human being is created in God's image.

By contrast, in Barth's work the moment of freedom always comes subsequent to, and as a result of, the moment of submission to legitimate authority. The Bible is "God's permanent address to the church," meaning that the church is not left alone to do its work. It stands over against human authority and tradition in the church—not in a dialectical relationship whereby Christians question its content, but in an active mode of selective annexation, appropriation, correction, and rejection of human endeavors in the church. The reason for defending freedom in biblical interpretation is not for the sake of freedom of private conscience but for the sake of a free Bible and thus, ultimately, for the sake of God's freedom to correct us. The difference between Barth and Fasching is graphically shown by the contrast in their interpretation of the book of Job; for Barth, Job was *wrong* to protest his dignity before God—wrong that in Barth's hands his so doing serves as a type for Christ's "becoming sin" for us.

Soteriologically, I think that Barth is closer to the truth than Fasching. We are not completely sanctified, and neither are any of our neighbors, however oppressed. There is no guarantee that our questioning God on the basis of the *empirical* dignity of our neighbor will be in the right. But does that mean that Fasching is wrong about



the presence of self-questioning elements in Scripture? I don't think so. The propositions that (1) we cannot save ourselves and must therefore hear God's voice in Scripture, and (2) there are places in Scripture that call for questioning God in faith, are not mutually exclusive. I would further argue that such passages as Jesus' healing on the Sabbath (Matt. 12:9-14; Mk. 3:1-6; Lk. 6:6-11) and the Good Samaritan's breaking the taboo against touching a corpse in order to rescue the (presumably dead)

***The propositions that (1) we cannot save ourselves and must therefore hear God's voice in Scripture, and (2) there are places in Scripture that call for questioning God in faith, are not mutually exclusive.***

victim (Lk. 10:34) show that Jesus' followers will be faced with instances where we have to decide whether true obedience to God's law is obedience to its literal sense or not. For these reasons, I think that *obedience to Scripture may sometimes mean questioning whether application of its literal sense furthers God's purposes today.*

Such questioning is what I think most reformists on this issue are doing. My own position on the issue of homosexual sex operates on the analogy of healing on the Sabbath. I believe that the distinction between marriage and fornication is sound, but that the limitation of marriage to heterosexual couples has not served all homosexual people well. (I realized that the notion of "serves well" is undefined at this point; further refinements will be found in section (3) below). Therefore I am in favor of either recognizing homosexual marriage or admitting same-sex unions as a third type alongside heterosexual marriage and singleness. Sex outside one of these recognized types would be considered fornication; infidelity within one would be considered adultery. (My use of the term "reformist" is meant to distinguish my position from a "radical" deconstruction of the distinction between marriage and fornication; it is not meant to imply that traditionalists are not "Reformed").

2. Before I proceed to further dissection of this issue, I want to point out that if I have correctly depicted this tension within Scripture itself as to how God is to be obeyed through it, then there will be (at least) three ways to distort this tension. As it happens, I think that all three ways are present in the current debate. Distortion (a) is what I think would ensue if this issue were considered beyond debate: a respect for the authority of the literal sense of Scripture that irons out the self-questioning elements in Scripture. Distortion (b) is what I think would ensue if the self-questioning elements in Scripture were elevated to the status of judging all others: a forgetfulness of the fact that we cannot save ourselves and that Scripture, being closer to God's act of reconciliation in Jesus Christ than we are, is God's permanent address to us. Distortion (c) is what happens if, for the sake of surface unity, attempts are

made to patch over the tensions without theological depth: shallow language that tries to make everybody happy but doesn't really say anything.

What I fear most for the future of the PC(USA) is a gravitation towards distortions (a), (b), and/or (c) with no deep theological discourse. If the original wording of Amendment B is allowed to stand, there is, thankfully, no rule that I cannot continue to argue in favor of the inclusion of homosexual couples under church marriage policy. If the revised wording is passed, there will, thankfully, continue to be necessary debate about its meaning. If there is a schism and I find that one of the spin-off churches tends toward distortion (a), while the other tends toward distortion (b), there is, thankfully, nothing to prevent me from gathering nourishment from theological mentors who are in the other grouping. However, I think that it will be an impoverishment of the

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church if the essence of Christianity is considered to be any one of these distortions—schism or no schism, amendment or no amendment.

3. I promised above to say something about my belief that the marriage-law as currently interpreted (limiting marriage to heterosexual couples) has not served all homosexual people well. Since whatever I say in favor of my position can be trumped by the deontological belief that homosexual sex is *always* wrong because God has so decreed it, I will illustrate some common reformist and traditionalist arguments by means of a chart. It so happens that both sides in this debate often use the same types of arguments against each other, but the traditionalist side includes this deontological veto, while the reformist does not. I think that in many of these arguments the traditionalists have a good case for a relative norm in favor of heterosexual marriage for most people, but an absolute prohibition of same-sex unions on Christian grounds comes from the view that the Bible has spoken on this issue, once and for all. The question then becomes: do the prohibitions against homosexual sex in Leviticus and Paul mean that this is a command for all God's people, everywhere and always? This is where the argument about self-questioning elements in Scripture kicks in. Where I dissent from the traditionalists is on the absolute prohibition. Some of the traditionalist sub-arguments deserve careful scrutiny and are more theologically deep than their reformist counterparts.



Structure of Argument	Reformist Use of Argument	Traditionalist Use of Same
(1) God's freedom	God is free to call people into same-sex relationships.	God is free to command us either to marry heterosexually or be celibate.
(2) God's holy love	The holiness of God's love is expressed between two people by such qualities as truthfulness, faithfulness, and respect for each other as created in the image of God.	The holiness of God's love is expressed not only by qualities analogous to God's covenant with God's people but by explicit biblical commands, including the forbidding of sexual relations between two people of the same sex.
(3) Human Dignity	One's sexuality is part of one's ineradicable human dignity. It is an affront to another's dignity to deny that person the right to exercise their sexuality under the same conditions that another group has. Denying homosexual people a same-sex relationship constitutes such discrimination.	Human dignity is only fully realized when redeemed by Christ. Part of that redemption is conformity to God's law (sanctification). The use of sexuality that most fully conforms to human dignity as redeemed by Christ is celibacy or marriage. Denying homosexual people church blessing for a same-sex relationship is not discrimination, because they have the right to a heterosexual marriage or celibacy like everyone else.
(4) Welcoming of outcasts and the hermeneutical privilege of the oppressed	Christ welcomed outcasts and the marginalized; therefore we should welcome outcasts and listen to their stories. Gay and lesbian people's stories of "coming out" have a special affinity with the Bible in that they are both stories of liberation from oppression.	Christ welcomed outcasts, forgave them, and told them to sin no more. True hospitality doesn't mean passive acceptance. It is more loving to return truth for honesty. Loving a person who is "out" doesn't mean approving actualization of their sexual orientation. A distinction has to be made between discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation (unjustifiable, in which case the analogy with the Exodus holds) and punishment for sin (in which case the analogy with the Exodus does not hold).



(5) Sexual repression and societal health	Sexuality is associated with the stewardship of the earth in Genesis ("be fruitful and multiply" is connected with "tend the earth and subdue it"). Sexual repression has in some cases contributed to pervasive ill-health and a reduced ability to contribute to society and to perform the tasks of Christian stewardship. While it is important to learn to be contentedly celibate in order to be responsibly married, enforcing lifetime sexual repression on a group for a condition which they did not choose is likely to deprive the church and the world of many of their gifts.	Sexual repression is one of the building blocks of social order, because people need to learn to be contentedly celibate before they can be responsibly married. Homosexual sex is an "intrinsically disordered act" [a phrase used in Roman Catholic deontology] that does not lead to God, however good the intentions of those who perform it are. A homosexual person who suffers ill-health because of sexual repression should learn to function heterosexually.
(6) Hygiene and stewardship of bodies	God's people are called to be good stewards of their bodies, including guarding against the spread of disease. The most important variables in the rate of spread of sexually transmitted diseases are promiscuity and hygiene, not whether sex is homosexual or heterosexual.	The fact that God's people are called to be good stewards of their bodies is an argument against homosexual sex, because homosexual sex even in a monogamous setting carries health risks that heterosexual sex does not.

Where I think the traditionalists have the strongest case is in claiming that we are only fully redeemed eschatologically and therefore cannot claim current desires and inclinations as automatically God's voice. However, this claim as related to homosexuality is complicated by the fact that many homosexual Christians have prayed for change in their sexual orientation, did not receive it, and found that they were better able to open up to God when they admitted their sexual orientation. Where I think traditionalists have the weakest case is in societal stewardship, because some homosexual people who have restrained themselves from entering into relationships have found that their self-restraint led to emotional isolation and difficulty in carrying out their ministry.

4. I have not proven that a Christian *must not* accept the literal sense of Scripture on this point. Any argument along those lines would have to go beyond the tensions involved

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in applying the literal sense of Scripture and argue from deeper deontological principles that trump the particular one about homosexual sex. One analogy that is often used is that of slavery—the Bible was used to justify slavery by slaveowners in the 19th century, while abolitionists used it for the opposite purpose. Today there is a consensus that the slaveowners were grossly distorting Scripture, even though Paul sent Onesimus back to Philemon. Whether or how this kind of argument can be used to justify the recognition of same-sex unions goes beyond the bounds of this letter. Arguments that one's sexuality is part of one's intrinsic dignity need to come to terms with the fact that our empirical selves are not fully sanctified.

However, regardless of whichever position one takes on the issue, there will be continuing challenges relating to the issue of welcoming homosexual people into Christian life and faith. For traditionalists, the issue will be how to welcome homosexual people into churches while upholding a marriage-law that asks them to be either celibate or functioning heterosexually. For some homosexual people, those who have a strong belief in the deontological prohibition against homosexual sex and a strong desire to remain celibate (or are converted into it), this may be a nourishing atmosphere. However, for those who lack this deontological belief and are not converted into it, such a policy is likely to lead to secret relationships. Robert Benne has tried to deal with this issue by admitting that there will be some homosexual Christians who have sex with people of their own sex, and the church should find some way to quietly support same-sex couples who wish to be monogamous, although the official position of the church should be traditional. Although realistic from the point of



view of our incomplete sanctification and the difficulty of maintaining lifelong celibacy because of a condition one did not choose, I find Benne's position unsatisfactory because it puts same-sex unions in institutional limbo.

For reformists, the challenges will be how to uphold the values that have been traditionally communicated by the

***Arguments that one's sexuality is part of one's intrinsic dignity need to come to terms with the fact that our empirical selves are not fully sanctified.***

distinction between heterosexual marriage and everything else, while giving institutional recognition to same-sex unions. Some values traditionally communicated by the value placed on heterosexual marriage (e.g., lifelong commitment) are equally communicated by a monogamous, lifelong same-sex union. Others are not as well communicated by the ideal picture of a same-sex union (e.g., the "otherness" of the partner; stewardship of the future through caring for children), but there is no reason that they cannot be lived out in practice. Many heterosexual marriages in practice do not live up to the ideal of lifelong commitment, respect for the otherness of the partner, and stewardship of the future (whether through caring for children or other responsibilities).

Sincerely,

Virginia W. Landgraf  
(Ph.D. Candidate in Theological  
Ethics, Princeton Theological  
Seminary)

*Response from the editors:*

Ms. Landgraf's letter in response to our October 1997 editorial concerning Amendment "A" presents the issues at stake in this dispute with fairness and equanimity. Many of her theological arguments make a fine contribution to the discussion of this issue. We appreciate her thoughtful response and are happy to include it in this issue. She does take issue with our conclusion: "By continuing to participate in endless discussion, well-meaning Presbyterians risk being a party to this shift [away from the normativity of heterosexual monogamy]. In healthy institutions everything cannot forever be a negotiable point of contention. Part of discernment consists in recognizing when to end debate and disputation, and to begin resistance and resolve. That time has come." We should clarify our meaning. We did not say that there should be no discussion anywhere concerning the ordination of practicing homosexuals. If that were the case, we would have to stop participating in the debate ourselves.

What we claimed was that for the church to continue to

allow agitation on the matter—forever encouraging another study or overture—is to stack the deck against those who maintain the traditional view. Protracted debate is not neutral between the positions. Ms. Landgraf's response implicitly confirms this point. Those who seek to liberalize the prohibition of homosexual relations see the issue in terms of justice, tolerance and equality, and compare it to previous debates such as slavery and the ordination of women. In that light, they hope official debate will lead to adoption of their view. Traditionalists who oppose such liberalization deny the analogy between this debate and earlier ones concerning slavery or women's ordination. They see the issue as a matter of sexual ethics grounded in God's created order as revealed in Scripture. Accordingly, they see the movement to demote the normativity of heterosexual marriage and chastity in singleness as a corruption of that order. When viewed in that light, it seems self-defeating if not immoral to contribute to a process that serves such corruption.

**PTR**

Teach me, O Lord, the way of  
your statutes,  
and I will observe it to the  
end.

Give me understanding, that I  
may keep your law  
and observe it with my whole  
heart.

Lead me in the path of your  
commandments,  
for I delight in it.

Turn my heart to your decrees,  
and not to selfish gain.

Turn my eyes from looking at  
vanities;  
give me life in your ways.

*Psalm 119: 33-37*



# *Causa Essendi* and Stephen Hawking's Question

DEAN L. OVERMAN

## Logical Issues

Christians, Jews, and Muslims believe that the universe had a beginning and that the universe was brought into being by a Creator. In this article I will discuss Stephen Hawking's no boundary proposal which hypothesizes that the universe did not have a beginning and consequently raises the question of a need for a Creator. Before examining Hawking's concept, a brief statement of some relevant logical principles may be helpful. *Circulus in probando* is a well known form of fallacious reasoning which assumes the conclusion in the premises. Assumed contradictions are often hidden premises in arguments. For example, the question "If a designer designed the universe, who designed the designer?" assumes the contradiction by asserting that the designer was designed. Such an assertion

- Everything that has a beginning has a cause.
- The universe had a beginning.
- The universe must have a cause.

Although the three faiths mentioned above believe in God as the cause for the beginning of the universe, the role of the Creator is much greater than only as the limited cause of the beginning of the cosmos. I shall argue that Hawking's proposal which excludes a beginning to the universe does not escape the profound, detailed and constant role of the Creator as a cause of the continuing existence of the universe.

## Wave function and the no boundary proposal

In 1970 Roger Penrose and Stephen Hawking published a paper which proved that in any expanding universe where the theory of general relativity applied and the universe contained as much matter as we observe, a Big Bang singularity must have existed. The universe had a beginning and time had a beginning. Accordingly, the universe had a cause. The beginning of time was a point of infinite density and infinite curvature.<sup>1</sup> In 1984 Hawking and James Hartle authored a paper which became the basis for Hawking's no boundary proposal (which he emphatically stresses is "just a proposal") to the effect that a singularity might not exist under certain questionable presuppositions in "imaginary" time, a defined mathematical concept. According to this proposal, a singularity could be avoided by a quantum mechanical wave function provided certain assumptions are made which are contrary to our understanding of the quantum state of the universe.

In their joint paper, Hawking and Hartle attempted to apply a unique and novel application of quantum physics to the universe as a whole. Rather than applying quantum mechanics to quantum particles, they proposed applying the principles of quantum mechanics to the creation of space and time. To avoid a singularity at the beginning of time, they used the analogy of a hydrogen atom examined from the perspective of a quantum mechanical wave function. The

***Hawking's proposal which excludes a beginning to the universe does not escape the profound, detailed and constant role of the Creator as a cause of the continuing existence of the universe.***

is an assumed contradiction hidden in the question. This is similar to asking the question: Who or what made triangles circular?

One may argue that if everything has a cause, then a designer must have a cause. Given the assumption in the dependent clause, the conclusion follows logically. If the assumption, however, was modified to: if everything that has a beginning has a cause, the conclusion would not follow if the designer was defined as something that does not have a beginning. If this modification was made and applied to the universe, the argument could be stated:

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**Dean L. Overman** is a senior partner in the Washington, D.C. law firm of Winston & Strawn and a former student at Princeton Theological Seminary. This article is partly excerpted from his recent book, *A Case Against Accident and Self-Organization* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishing Co., 1997).

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<sup>1</sup>Stephen Hawking and Roger Penrose, "The Singularities of Gravitational Collapse and Cosmology," *Proceedings of the Royal Society of London Series A*, 314, 529-548 (1970).



singularity is avoided when the hydrogen atom is described by a probability wave function.

A quantum equation developed by Erwin Schrödinger shows that the probability of an electron's location depends upon the sum of the trajectories which are determined by the

**Hawking uses imaginary time as the dimension for his calculations involving imaginary numbers which, of course, are a valid and useful mathematical concept. This controversial approach appears to many physicists as a mathematical contrivance or trick to arrive at a conclusion consistent with his metaphysical predilection for avoiding a singularity.**

magnitude and the phase of the waves that distinguish those trajectories.<sup>2</sup> Schrodinger's probability wave function applies to all matter. For large objects the wave function is not significant and the location of a car or a rocket ship is not reduced to a calculation of probabilities. On a much smaller level, however, such as a subatomic level or in the smallness of the initial compression of the universe to a point smaller than an atomic particle, probability calculations are required.

Hawking and Hartle proposed calculating the wave function for the whole universe as one would calculate an electron's wave function. They speculated that when the universe was in a state of minimum excitation (vacuum state), the singularity could disappear just as a wave function description avoids a singularity in an atom with one electron and one proton (the hydrogen atom). *Caret initio et fine.*<sup>3</sup> In their own words: In the classical theory the singularity is a place where the field equations, and hence predictability, break down. The situation is improved in the quantum theory. An analogous improvement occurs in the problem of an electron orbiting a proton. In the classical theory there is a singularity and a breakdown of predictability when the electron is at the same position as the proton. However, in the quantum theory there is no singularity or breakdown. In an s-wave state, the amplitude for the electron to coincide with the proton is finite and non-zero, but the electron just carries on to the other side . . . The ground-state wave function in the simple mini-superspace model that we have considered with a conformally

invariant field does not correspond to the quantum state of the universe that we live in because the matter wave function does not oscillate. However, it seems that this may be a consequence of using only zero mass fields and that the ground-state wave function for a Universe with a massive scalar field would be much more complicated and might provide a model of quantum state of the observed Universe. If this were the case, one would have solved the problem of the initial boundary conditions of the Universe: the boundary conditions are that it has no boundary.<sup>4</sup>

In his subsequent book, *A Brief History of Time*, Hawking is very cautious in describing his speculations which attempt to avoid a singularity and a beginning to the universe. He admits that his proposal is *plus in posse quam in actu.*<sup>5</sup> In his book he attempts to use imaginary numbers to circumvent a beginning. Hawking uses imaginary time as the dimension for his calculations involving imaginary numbers which, of course, are a valid and useful mathematical concept.<sup>6</sup> This controversial approach appears to many physicists as a mathematical contrivance or trick to arrive at a conclusion consistent with his metaphysical predilection for avoiding a singularity. The universe he describes exists only in mathematical terms and apart from real spacetime. He emphasizes the speculative nature of his concept and stresses that it only functions in imaginary time and not in real time:

I'd like to emphasize that this idea that time and space should be finite without a boundary is just a *proposal: it cannot be deduced from some other principle*. Like any other scientific theory, it may initially be put forward for aesthetic or metaphysical reasons, but the real test is whether it makes predictions that agree with observation...If

What can be seen on earth indicates neither the total absence, nor the manifest presence of divinity, but the presence of a hidden God. Everything bears this stamp.  
Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*

<sup>4</sup>James B. Hartle and Stephen W. Hawking, "Wave Function of the Universe," *Physical Review D* 28, 2974, 2975 (1983).

<sup>5</sup>More in possibility than in fact.

<sup>6</sup>Imaginary numbers have unusual characteristics. For example, the square of an imaginary number can be a negative number.

<sup>2</sup>Roy E. Peacock, *A Brief History of Eternity* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1990), p. 24.

<sup>3</sup>It lacks a beginning and an end.



the universe really is in such a quantum state, there would be no singularities in the history of the universe in imaginary time. It might seem therefore that my more recent work had completely undone the results of my earlier work on singularities. But . . . when one goes back to the real time in which we live, however, there will still appear to be singularities. The poor astronaut who falls into a black hole will still come to a sticky end; only if he lived in imaginary time would he encounter no singularities . . . In real time, the universe has a beginning and an end at singularities that form a boundary to space-time and at which the laws of science break down.<sup>7</sup> (emphasis added)

Hawking appears to be using a kind of regressive reasoning which can be a valid approach to assist in creating plausible hypotheses. This kind of reasoning, however, requires some verification. Reasoning backwards is useful, but it must be verified by an antecedent which is *secundum veritatem*.<sup>8</sup> Hawking indicates that his proposal may have been put forward to coincide with metaphysical predilections and admits that his proposal cannot even be deduced from any verified principle. In an article published in *Science Spectra* in 1996 entitled, "The Human Paradox: Stephen Hawking and His Work," Gordon Fraser notes that Hawking acknowledges that his equations are constructed in such a way as to determine a result which is consistent with no beginning to the universe: In constructing a quantum mechanical picture of the universe, Hawking says, "we will solve these equations subject to the conditions that the universe has no boundary." In other words, spacetime is completely self-contained, and the equations of the mathematical framework are constructed in such a way as to ensure this. As Hawking says, "There would be no singularities, and the laws of science would hold everywhere, including at the beginning of the universe. The way the universe began would be determined by the laws of science."<sup>9</sup>

Starting with the result one wants and working backwards is not unusual and not always an incorrect procedure. In many circumstances reasoning backwards is a very useful device for constructing plausible hypotheses, but it cannot be substituted for a rigorous proof. It is merely a contrivance to assist one's thinking. Regressive reasoning or reasoning backwards begins with the desired end and then asks what antecedent could produce that end. After determining that antecedent, one asks what could produce that antecedent and so on until *one moves backwards to something already known to be true*. This is a type of heuristic reasoning which serves to discover truth, but only as a device to assist thinking, not as a verification of

"Either God is or is not." But to which view shall we be inclined? Reason cannot decide this question. Infinite chaos separates us. At the far end of this infinite distance, a coin is being spun which will come down heads or tails. How will you wager? Reason cannot make you choose either, reason cannot prove either wrong.

Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*

truth.<sup>10</sup> As I noted, Hawking emphasizes that his no boundary concept is only a proposal and not even a theory. He admits that *it cannot be deduced from another principle already known to be true*. He uses regressive reasoning without any verified principle in the sequence to support his proposal.

Nevertheless, Hawking speculates that imaginary time may be more fundamental for an understanding of the universe than ordinary time. He proposes that time really was like space in the very early universe. At an instant in imaginary time, space and time dimensions were identical. Oxford Professor Keith Ward is unimpressed with Hawking's use of imaginary time:

According to the Hartle/Hawking model . . . time itself is signified by a complex number (part of which involves an imaginary number, such as the square root of a negative number), and it becomes an internal property of a set of three-spaces. I do not think this can any longer rightly be called "time" at all, in any sense we can recognize it. What has happened is that the phenomenological reality of time has been transformed into a mathematical variable, and then treated as a pure abstraction, which, far, far from giving the "true reality" of time, has less and less relation to the real time one started from. The conceptual problems of such a model are enormous . . . It is only because he does not ask why the quantum laws are as they are that he can say that the universe is not affected by anything outside its own

<sup>7</sup>Hawking, *A Brief History in Time*, pp. 136, 137 and 139.

<sup>8</sup>According to truth.

<sup>9</sup>Gordon Fraser, "The Human Paradox: Stephen Hawking and His Work," *Science Spectra* 4, 13 (1996).

<sup>10</sup>G. Polya, *How to Solve It: A New Aspect of Mathematical Method*, 2nd ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), p. 142.



parameters . . . The physical existence of this universe, even on highly disputable quantum gravity theories such as those of Hawking, is due either to extraordinary chance or to a choice from possible mathematical structures of extraordinary precision.<sup>11</sup>

Kitty Ferguson points out that Hawking's no boundary proposal actually has boundaries. She notes the conventional definition of boundary conditions which comprise the initial conditions in an experiment. These initial conditions may not have boundaries in space and time, but are still boundary conditions in the "underlying context of logic and laws, the specification required in order for the proposed situation to exist at all."<sup>12</sup> In other words, the universe proposed by Hawking, which would have no boundaries in space and time, could only exist if Hawking proposed boundary conditions of underlying logic which would be required for the existence of such a universe. Ferguson has her doubts about his proposal:

Hawking is the first to point out that his idea is just a proposal. He doesn't even call it a theory. It's a spectacularly wild leap of imagination. He hasn't deduced these boundary conditions from some other principle . . . mathematical and logical consistency do not demand this model of the universe as opposed to others. Nothing has so far shown that it is the only consistent model or one to be strongly preferred over others. Could it have happened this way? It's far too early in the game to answer that question. Did it happen this way? Only on aesthetic and philosophical grounds, and because it upholds one of the assumptions of science, is it possible at present to prefer this theory over others.<sup>13</sup>

### Hawking's question and the need of a Creator as *causa essendi*

Not everyone is satisfied that Hartle and Hawking's no boundary proposal is internally consistent. Christians and other theists should note that Don Page, one of Hawking's collaborators, has used the example of an artist's drawing of a circle to illustrate that the absence of a beginning or an end does not remove the artist as the cause of the circle.<sup>14</sup> The issue of a beginning to the universe is not necessarily fundamental to the question of the existence of God. Readers with religious faith who believe in the reality of God need not view Stephen Hawking's no boundary proposal as a battle ground. In referring to the absence of a singularity or a beginning in his proposal, Hawking asks the rhetorical question, "What place, then, for a creator?"

The answer I assume Hawking is making to this rhetorical question fails to distinguish between *causa essendi* (a cause

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of existence) and *causa fieri* (a cause of becoming). Something which exists may need a cause for its continuing existence without necessarily needing a cause for its becoming. Even assuming, *argumenti causa*,<sup>15</sup> that the no boundary proposal reflects reality, a Creator who is a necessary and non-contingent being is required as a *causa essendi* for the continued existence of the universe pursuant to the following reasoning:

To avoid the fallacy of *petitio principii*, assume that the universe exists without a beginning. (If we assume a beginning, we beg the question of a creative cause.) This is consistent with Hawking's proposal and is perhaps the main motivation behind it.

A distinction must be made between *causa essendi* and *causa fieri*. A mare may be *causa fieri* of her foal, but a mare does not act as *causa essendi* of her foal; she is not the cause of the continuing existence of her foal. A mare which passes away while her foal continues to inhabit the earth cannot be the cause of the foal's continuing existence. A match may be *causa fieri* of a flame, but oxygen acts as *causa essendi* because it is a necessary condition for the continuing existence of the flame.

Something which needs a cause of its continuing existence at every moment is *contingent* upon that cause; it is not *necessary* in and through itself.

As we have discussed, this universe is only one among many possible universes which might have existed. We can conceive of other universes which could exist with different characteristics than our universe. Because other universes are possible, this universe is not the only universe that could ever exist. It is not a *necessary* universe. Because it is merely a *possible* universe and not a *necessary* universe,

<sup>11</sup>Keith Ward, *God, Chance & Necessity* (Oxford: One World, 1996), pp. 41, 43 and 44.

<sup>12</sup>Kitty Ferguson, *The Fire in the Equations* (Grand Rapids: W. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Inc., 1994), p. 137.

<sup>13</sup>Ferguson, pp. 113 and 128.

<sup>14</sup>Ferguson, pg. 139.

<sup>15</sup>For the sake of argument.



its existence is not necessary in and through itself. It is not the only universe which can ever exist.

Something must exist when it cannot be anything except what it is; it cannot not exist. It is *necessary*. However, something which could be other than what it is might not exist. A universe which could be other than what it is might not be at all. Such a universe has the possibility or the potential for non-existence.

A universe which has the potential for non-existence is a *contingent* rather than a *necessary* universe. Anything that is contingent requires a *causa essendi*, an effective cause of

***The reasoning for a causa essendi for the preservation of the universe is consistent with a God whose involvement in the universe is continuous.***

its continuing existence. This merely possible universe is contingent and requires a *causa essendi* to prevent the possibility of its non-existence. This merely possible universe requires a preservative cause of its continuing existence to protect it from the possibility of annihilation (its reduction to nothingness). This preservative activity is an action of exnihilation (coming out of existence out of nothing) as it is juxtaposed to an action of annihilation.

Even if Hawking's boundary-less proposal is correct (which is very unlikely) and the universe does not need a *causa fieri* for its coming into existence, it does need a *causa essendi* for its preservation and to protect it from the possibility or potential of a reduction to nothingness or annihilation.

To prevent annihilation, the *causa essendi* cannot be a natural cause because natural causes are themselves contingent things. Contingent things cannot act as *causa essendi* because they do not have the cause of their own continuing existence in themselves. Something that is *necessary and uncaused* is required to act as *causa essendi* of a *contingent* thing.

If we define the concept of God as a necessary rather than a contingent being, God cannot be part of the universe, because the universe and all of the individual things in it are contingent in their existence. A necessary existence means that such an existence is uncaused, independent and unconditioned. In this concept God has a necessary existence. Thus, even if we assume that Hawking's questionable proposal is true, the answer to his presumed rhetorical question concerning the need for a Creator is that a Creator is necessary as a preservative cause of the existence of the universe.

The important premise in this argument is that the universe is contingent and not necessary. Because other universes are possible, our universe is not necessary in and through itself. If it is not necessary, it is contingent. As Professor Keith Ward argues:

To say that the existence of this universe is

necessary is to say that no other universe could possibly exist. But how could one know that, without knowing absolutely everything? Even the most confident cosmologists might suspect that there is something they do not know. So it does not look as though the necessity of this universe can be established . . . The physical cosmos does not seem to be necessary. We can seemingly think of many alternatives to it. There might, for instance, be an inverse cube law instead of an inverse square law, and then things would be very different, but they might still exist. We can see how mathematics can be necessary, but it is a highly dubious assertion that there is only one consistent set of equations which could govern possible physical realities. We cannot bridge the gap between mathematical necessity and physical contingency. How could a temporal and apparently contingent universe come into being by quasi-mathematical necessity?<sup>16</sup>

In his book, *How to Think About God*, Mortimer Adler states this argument and his position that this premise cannot be affirmed with certitude but only beyond a reasonable doubt. He concluded that a preponderance of reasons favor the belief that God exists. Adler himself was persuaded that God exists either beyond a reasonable doubt or by a preponderance of reasons.<sup>17</sup> The reasoning for a *causa essendi* for the preservation of the universe is consistent with a God whose involvement in the universe is continuous. As *causa essendi* God would not be simply a cause which began or wound up a universe compossible

***With respect to the existence of God, one may argue that each person must make an act of free choice in determining his own conclusions. The reasoning on either side of this choice does not produce an absolutely compelling argument. Either conclusion requires a leap of faith. It is up to each individual to decide in which direction he or she will leap. No perfectly ironclad argument destroys the freedom to make that decision.***

with life and then left it to run on its own, but a cause

<sup>16</sup>Ward, pp. 23-24.

<sup>17</sup>For a complete discussion of this *causa essendi* argument see Mortimer Adler, *How to Think About God: A Guide for the 20th Century Pagan*. (New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1980).



which intimately and constantly preserves the universe in all of its detail. With respect to the existence of God, one may argue that each person must make an act of free choice in determining his own conclusions. The reasoning on either side of this choice does not produce an absolutely compelling argument. Either conclusion requires a leap of faith. It is up to each individual to decide in which direction he or she will leap. No perfectly ironclad argument destroys the freedom to make that decision. Owen Gingerich appears to agree with this assessment in describing a discussion he had with Freeman Dyson and concludes:

From a Christian perspective, the answer to Hawking's Query is that God is more than the omnipotence who, in some other space-time dimension, decides when to push the mighty ON switch. A few years ago I had the opportunity to discuss these ideas with Freeman Dyson, one of the most thoughtful physicists of our day. "You worry too much about Hawking," he assured me. "And actually it's rather silly to think of God's role in creation as just sitting up there on a platform and pushing the switch." Indeed, creation is a far broader concept than just the moment of the Big Bang. God is the Creator in the much larger sense of designer and intender of the universe, the powerful Creator with a plan and an intention for the existence of the entire universe. The very structures of the universe itself, the rules of its operation, its continued maintenance, these are the more important aspects of creation. Even Hawking has some notion of this, for near the end of his book he asks, "What is it that breathes fire into the equations and makes a universe for them to describe? The usual approach of science of constructing a mathematical model cannot answer the question of why there should be a universe for the model to describe. Why does the universe go to all the bother of existing?"<sup>18</sup> Indeed, this is one of the most profound, and perhaps unanswerable, theological questions.

For Christians there is great comfort in the concept of a loving God sustaining and upholding us in every breath we take. This fits well with the concept of the Incarnate God, who has atoned for us, holding all things together: "In him everything in heaven and earth was created, . . . the whole universe has been created through him and for him. He exists before all things, and all things are held together in him."<sup>19</sup>

**PTR**

Now Faith, in the sense in which I am here using the word [accepting or regarding as true the doctrines of Christianity], is the art of holding on to things your reason has once accepted, in spite of your changing moods. For moods will change, whatever view your reason takes. I know that by experience. Now that I am a Christian I do have moods in which the whole thing looks very improbable: but when I was an atheist I had moods in which Christianity looked terribly probable. This rebellion of your moods against your real self is going to come anyway. That is why Faith is such a necessary virtue: unless you teach your moods "where they get off," you can never be either a sound Christian or even a sound atheist, but just a creature dithering to and fro, with its beliefs really dependent on the weather and the state of its digestion. Consequently one must train the habit of Faith.

C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*

<sup>18</sup>Owen Gingerich, *Kepler's Anguish and Hawking's Queries: Reflection on Natural Theology, The Great Ideas Today* (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc. 1992).

<sup>19</sup>Colossians 1:15-17.



# Christology, the Virgin Conception, and the "Y" Chromosome

MICHAEL D. BUSH

The presence in the Apostle's Creed of a confession that Jesus Christ "was conceived by the Holy Ghost and born of the Virgin Mary" does not require any special explanation. In the biblical narratives of the birth of Jesus, this episode appears in the sequence of events leading to his Passion and Resurrection. After its appearance in Matthew and Luke, nothing special is made of it. Compared with Hesiod's tale about the emergence of the full grown and fully armed Athena from Zeus's head, the story of Jesus's birth is treated with distinctive modesty and chasteness as one fact among others that are given about him. In the Bible, the unique origin of Jesus Christ as a self in history is simply stated without histrionics, with the same simplicity that is equally striking in the Easter narratives. Our Lord's mortal life is bracketed by events that point to his utter uniqueness: he enters the stream of human existence from outside, in a way that can only look improbable from within, and rises up out of that stream on the other side, having crossed it diagonally in the downstream direction; and again the departure—his resurrection from death to perfected life—can only be surprising and perhaps even incredible from our point of view from within the stream. Yet the Bible tells us about them with simple, disciplined language.

Apparently, the New Testament sees its testimony to Jesus's unique origin as fairly straightforward reporting. Jesus' conception as a human fetus within his mother, without the involvement of a man, is simply given to us as the original fact about the human life of Jesus. After the passion, the tomb is just empty, as simple as that: "he is not here," until he appears again the same and yet even more himself. All this is given to us in an unpretentious, non-anxious narrative, apparently assuming that the divine power of the reality it depicts is able to create its own credibility with those who have ears to hear.

## The Problem of the Y Chromosome

Arthur Peacocke is an articulate spokesman for the case against virgin conception as a meaningful and intelligible doctrine. His basic objection is scientific, and from this he concludes to a further theological objection. The basic problem, according to him, revolves around the Y chromosome: It is that, "For Mary to have been pregnant with the foetus that became Jesus without the involvement of a human

father—that is, without a Y chromosome from (say) Joseph—there are, biologically only two possibilities. Either (1) Mary provided the ovum which was then transformed by an act of God (impregnation by the Holy Spirit?) into a viable, reproducing cell, as if a sperm had entered the ovum; or (2) there was created such an impregnated ovum within her uterus with no contribution from Mary's own genetic heritage at all" (Peacocke, p. 276). In either case, Peacocke points out, either part (in case 1) or all (in case 2) of Jesus' genetic constitution would have had to be created *de novo* by God at the time of Jesus' conception.

This conclusion is unacceptable to him for at least three reasons. First, he thinks any such scenario is simply improbable on scientific grounds. The second objection is

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theological, in that he is concerned that these possibilities are not consistent with the doctrines of God and of creation he has suggested and elaborated earlier in his book, in which, he says, "it is possible today to believe" (p. 277). The third objection he raises is that, in either case, "it is impossible to see how Jesus could be said to share our human nature," if he were not fully located in the stream of human evolution (p. 277). His objections, then, are that to affirm a virginal conception of Jesus is to posit an event that is known on scientific grounds never otherwise to occur, to contradict his understanding of who God is and how God acts, and to posit a form of docetism.

I take it as axiomatic that the reasons for accepting or denying a theory in any field of inquiry must, in the final analysis, be internal to the field, even if the original insight that leads to the decision comes in from somewhere else. This means that, in theology one looks for genuinely theo-

**Michael D. Bush** is a Ph.D. candidate in history of doctrine at Princeton Theological Seminary.



logical reasons for revising or affirming a doctrine or theory or model, even when the motivating insight has come in from somewhere else.

If this is true, then on the face of it Peacocke's assertion that the virginal conception of Jesus should be denied because it places at risk the genuine humanity of Jesus Christ would seem to have real force. The point is internal to theology, and in my opinion Peacocke has given the two conflicting issues (the true humanity of Christ and the virginity of Mary) the correct weight; that is, the humanity of Christ is the more important to preserve, and therefore "trumps" the virginity of Mary, if there is a genuine conflict between the two. However, I at least do not believe that Peacocke has made the case that such a conflict exists.

First of all there is the historical point of which Peacocke is aware, that precisely the *denial* of the doctrine, and not its affirmation, has been associated with docetism in the history of Christian thought. Those who wish to deny the true embodiment of God in the human life of Jesus of Nazareth have also, indeed *therefore*, denied the virginity of Mary. Peacocke argues that in light of what we now know about conception, the point now cuts in the opposite direction. We will have to talk about the status of the Y chromosome below, and how Jesus might have gotten one, but on this historical point it is enough to observe that whatever may be the case in theory, the denial of virgin conception has historically been associated with a whole

*The implication, apparently, is that such a thing would be hard, impossibly hard, for God to do! This claim does not even rise to the level of classical paganism in its conception of God. At least old pagans regarded the gods as the most powerful beings in the universe. It seems that in Peacocke's view, God stands on the scale of cleverness and ability somewhere below a good engineer. Moreover, as Peacocke sees it, to provide a sperm or fully fertilized egg is something that God simply would not do even if he could.*

range of heterodox Christologies including the docetic. The kerygmatic doctrine of virgin conception, once made an article of the creed, was related to the concept of incarnation by affirming that in Mary's womb the Word of God has become truly human in the way that we are human, in an utterly unique event. It was a statement that docetists could not affirm. The point was that Jesus developed *in utero* in the normal human way, and had a normal human birth, even though he was the Son of God and not of a human father. Something along these lines simply follows from what

J.N.D. Kelly calls, "the double premiss of apostolic Christology, viz. that Christ as a Person was indivisibly one, and that He was simultaneously fully divine and fully human" (Kelly, *Doctrines*, p. 139). It is worthwhile to note this historical point, because one of the guiding ideas in what we might call theological "theory choice" as with theory choice in the sciences, is continuity with what we already know. But the historical point does not cut to the heart of Peacocke's claim that the doctrine of virgin conception entails a kind of docetism. The crux of the matter is the Y chromosome.

Peacocke's charge of docetism against this doctrine arises from the problem of a Y chromosome in Jesus' genetic makeup, which he had to have had, since he was male. With this basic biological fact, we can gladly agree. It does seem to be an "assured result of science," which is no more likely to be disproved than is the roundness of the earth, that genetically normal males have a chromosome that is designated 'Y,' which carries the genetic material that makes for maleness. Peacocke is obviously right that if Jesus did not have a Y chromosome, he was not, as we believe, truly human, because all men have such a chromosome. The only question is how he got it, and for an answer there are two proposals on the table: Either he got it directly from a man, presumably Joseph, who impregnated his mother in the normal, sexual way, or God provided it in a unique, providential act. Thus far Peacocke and the ecumenical tradition are of one mind.

However, a claim that, if we affirm the virgin conception of Jesus, God would have had to provide a Y chromosome in some way, would not entail that Jesus was not truly human. This is because, assuming (as everyone presumably does) that Jesus had a Y chromosome, the mere fact that he did not receive it from within of the stream of human generation does not call his biological humanity into question. If we suppose that Jesus was in the basic biological, chromosomal sense, human, then that is all we need to know. If a modern scientist, say a paleontologist, were able to evaluate Jesus' body, including his chromosomal material, to answer the question whether he was truly human, he or she would, everyone supposes, find that he was. The question how he came by that body, with those chromosomes: through the evolutionary process or in some other way would not come up within the terms of the examination, and therefore would not be used to answer the question of his true humanity.

There are at least two other problems with Peacocke's requirement that for Jesus to be human all his genetic material had to come to him through the normal process. First, it implies a materialist anthropology, and one that turns out not to do at least one thing any anthropology which claims to have theological significance should do, namely, give a plausible answer to the question, "What is a human being, in distinction from other animals?" Peacocke implies that one *sine qua non* of human being is full participation in the general evolutionary stream of generation. Yet it is not simply human life, but all life as we know it that participates in this biological process. Obviously, then, such participation cannot be the distinctive characteristic of humanity. Second, this requirement begs the question of the uniqueness of the incarnation, which as I shall argue later, is virtually the



whole content of the doctrine of the virgin conception.

I believe that to suppose that God provided (in some way we cannot know) a Y chromosome in Jesus' cellular makeup, does not entail a denial of his genuine humanity. The only question is whether a genetically human Y chromosome was present. Everything we know speaks for, and nothing against, the supposition that it was. With this bit of reckoning any question of our Lord's true humanity, and therefore of docetism implicit in the doctrine of virgin conception, is at an end. Peacocke's question about what might be supposed to be encoded on Jesus' Y chromosome is a red herring. At the most mundane, practical level, it is irrelevant since we have no reason for thinking Jesus had any children; thus there are no consequences for the evolutionary process, the integrity of which Peacocke is so anxious to defend. More importantly, though, the question is speculative almost to the point of making the Y chromosome a piece of metaphysics.

### Consistency with the Concept of God

Peacocke argues throughout his book that the concept of God "in which it is possible to believe" in a scientific age is one that describes a God who does not make exceptions in any sense to the laws of the created order, to which God has in a self-limiting way also agreed to subject the divine purposes and intentions. In a way reminiscent of, but not fully continuous with, process thought, he speaks of "divine being and becoming." He believes that genuinely random chance functions in the world as a part of the creative process, so that there are occurrences in the world that God does not know before they occur, which are therefore outside God's providence.

It is fully consistent with Peacocke's idea of God that a virgin conception, whether of Jesus or of any living creature, is to be rejected. For such a thing to happen, the only possibility imaginable is that "God must suddenly have brought into existence either (1) a complete spermatozoon, which then entered an ovum of Mary or (2) a completely fertilized ovum. Each of these biological entities, especially the second, is an enormously complex system of actual molecules, some very large such as DNA, engaged in dynamic biological activity in an organization as, or rather more, complex than that of a modern factory!" The implication, apparently, is that such a thing would be hard, impossibly hard, for God to do! This claim does not even rise to the level of classical paganism in its conception of God. At least old pagans regarded the gods as the most powerful beings in the universe. It seems that in Peacocke's view, God stands on the scale of cleverness and ability somewhere below a good engineer. Moreover, as Peacocke sees it, to provide a sperm or fully fertilized egg is something that God simply would not do even if he could: "All the evidence is that is *not* how God has created and is creating, as explained in Part I – certainly not the God whose mode of being and becoming we have here been discerning as one in whom it is possible today to believe" (p. 277).

Now, as I intimated above, there is very little common ground between someone whose faith in God falls along such lines, and someone else who begins rather with a privileging of the biblical witness, on which we could stand to

hold a productive conversation. This is very near our theological axioms, the theses that we take to be beyond either the possibility or the necessity of proof. Another way to put it is that Peacocke is operating out of the matrix of English natural theology, in which there is a minimization of the role of the Christian Bible as a source of knowledge.

***To deny in principle the possibility of virgin conception in the case of Jesus, on the ground that, if it were true, it would be unique, or (to put it less constructively) an anomaly, in human history, is to beg the question, then. It is, and always has been, the meaning of the biblical and credal affirmation that the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ is a unique event, utterly without analogy in human history.***

and a privileging of the theoretical and practical insights of experimental reason. Another perspective, which I, at least, would advocate, joins a higher regard for the testimony of the apostles and prophets with a conviction that human experience is too corrupted by self-interest to be of much use for theology.

### Scientific Implausibility

Peacocke has another objection with which we must contend with more vigor, namely, that given the well-established biological reality of this world, the idea of virgin conception is simply implausible, and to be rejected out of hand for the general reason that this is not how babies are made. Peacocke argues, in chorus with every skeptic, that:

The relevant facts, determined by the biology of the last one hundred and fifty years, are as follows. Any complete human being begins life by the union of an ovum from a female human being and a spermatozoon from a male one . . . In the formation of ova and spermatozoa ordinary, somatic cells split so that the members of the various pairs of chromosomes separate out into new 'half-cells' (an ovum and a sperm cell) containing one union of two such 'half-cells' one from each parent. The mother *always* contributes an X-type chromosome to this new line of cells while the father contributes *either* and X *or* a Y; . . . This is how all human beings begin . . . (p. 275)

Peacocke is implying, and rightly so if the data that fall under the analysis of "the biology of the last one hundred and fifty years" explain the case of every human life utterly without remainder, that there has never been a human life of



whom this process did not obtain in the same way that it obtains for every other. If this is the case, and Jesus is assumed to be truly human, the impossibility on simple biological grounds of his being conceived "without the involvement of a human father" (p. 275), simply follows. Under an empty sky, so to speak, or even in a universe inhabited by the kind of "divine being and becoming" that Peacocke postulates, there is no alternative.

If we can imagine no more powerful meaning of the doctrine of virgin conception than that it is "a wonderworking magical kind of act" (p. 277), still more if we suppose it to be nothing more than a legendary story, then we are defeated by the weight of the evidence of biology and experience.

It turns out though, that certainly as early as the end of the second century, and (if Raymond Brown is correct) already in the New Testament, it was precisely the natural implausibility of virgin conception that gave both rise and meaning to the Christian affirmation of it in Jesus' case. A correspondence between those who denied the virgin conception and those who denied, in one way or another, the reality of the incarnation had emerged by the end of the second century. Among these, both the Ebionites, who were a Judaizing sect, and certain adoptionists such as Paul of Samosata, expressly denied the virgin birth (as it was put), because it implied the divinity of Christ and the uniqueness of God's embodiment in him. (Kelly, *Doctrines* pp. 139-140). On the other hand, gnostic docetists denied the virgin conception because they would have nothing to do with the Word of God being in contact with real, worldly and therefore evil, flesh. Even before those variant movements arose, though, this idea had power for Christians: Raymond Brown points out that the meaning of the infancy narratives in Matthew and Luke is that "Jesus is God's Son in a unique manner, for Mary conceived her child through the Holy Spirit without a male partner" (p. 83).

To deny in principle the possibility of virgin conception in the case of Jesus, on the ground that, if it were true, it would be unique, or (to put it less constructively) an anomaly, in human history, is to beg the question, then. It is, and always has been, the meaning of the biblical and credal affirmation that the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ is a unique event, utterly without analogy in human history.

I would go further, and say that I, at least, do not know of any theologian who denied this doctrine who did not either also either deny the uniqueness of the incarnation, or resort to some kind of conceptual funny business to bring off a coherent Christology. (Emil Brunner's attempt to deny the virgin conception while hanging on to an anhypostatic-enhypostatic doctrine of the person of Christ comes to mind here.) I am open to being taught on this point, but I know of no denial of this doctrine that is "innocent" in the sense that the denial is just a phenomenon in the presentation that has no explicit or implicit consequences.

### The Importance of the Virgin Conception

The importance of the doctrine can be sorted into distinct issues.

First, it implies the Christian doctrine of the person of

Christ: He is God in whatever way the Father is God, except that he is not the Father; and he is human in whatever way we are human, except that he is not alienated from God by sin. The Creed itself sorts this issue into its two sides, by speaking in separate phrases of his conception by the Holy Spirit, and birth to the Virgin Mary. In light of contemporary criticisms of this teaching, it turns out to be important that the second phrase indicates Christ's *humanity*, and its denial has historically been associated with the denial that Jesus was truly human.

Second, it implies the uniqueness and finality of God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ. Christians believe that Jesus Christ is not one in a series of incarnations of God, but is the one unique and final incarnation of God in human life. For this reason, this doctrine is scandalous and embarrassing to a religiously pluralistic culture, whose axiom is that there must be many expressions of the divine in history; religious pluralism assumes, with Schleiermacher, that in particular circumstances anyone might be the incarnation of God. Over against this faith, the ecumenical Christian tradition, without meaning to give offense or be quarrelsome, very modestly states this conviction that has grasped us, that in Jesus Christ the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob has lived a human life, and we understand this incarnation to be the final and unsurpassable revelation of God's character and identity.

Third, the manner of Christ's conception indicates his holiness. In many classical theologians, this point has been made in connection with the asexual character of his origin. Today we associate this linkage with Augustine, but it is by no means unique to him. This link between sex and sin, and the absence of sex with holiness, is debatable, and has been vigorously contested in the last fifty years. However, regardless of whether this link is cogent, there is at least one other significant way of understanding the link between virgin conception and holiness which predates Augustine in the history of Christian thought. Such early theologians as Athanasius of Alexandria often spoke of the Logos preparing himself a fleshly temple in the body of the virgin.

One matter that is not significantly at issue in this article of the Creed is any special rank or distinction among the followers of Jesus Christ for his mother. Our Lord himself put paid to all special doctrines of Mary during his own lifetime: "A woman in the crowd called out, 'Blessed is the mother who gave you birth and nursed you.' He replied, 'Blessed, rather, are those who hear the word of God and obey it.'" (Luke 11:27-28, NIV). The virgin conception of Jesus is a Christological doctrine: It is important, not for what it tells us about Mary, but for what it tells us about Jesus. Of course, it would be too much to claim that it does not tell us anything at all about Mary, but the physiological fact that it indicates is not self-explanatory. There is no logical connection between virgin conception as such and incarnation as such. The particular virginal conception of Jesus of Nazareth is a witness to the fact that he is the Lord God living a human life, but there is no possibility of a general theory of how virgin conceptions are related to incarnations of God. As John Leith has pointed out in his recent book *Crisis in the Church*, there could be a million virgin births without an incarnation of God. The reality to which this particular physiological fact points is therefore not the distinc-



tiveness, virtue, or blessedness of Mary herself, but the unique and utterly unanalyzable characteristics of Jesus Christ to which we have alluded.

There have always been denials of this doctrine in the history of theology. Most such denials, in keeping with the church doctrine, indicate a theological point larger than the physiological issue. The exception of course is the general point of view that rules out the miraculous, the unique, and the unanalysable as a prolegomenon to any biblical interpretation or theological reflection. There are ways this kind of objection can be met by believers, but there is a mound of resources available for this without me going into it also (C.S. Lewis's *Miracles* is as good a place as any to start, but it shouldn't be mistaken for the final word on the subject.) This is a theoretical objection which can only be met with another theory or with multiple counter-instances. So without attempting to address the principle here, I will simply argue that however this theory may have it, the doctrine of the virgin conception makes sense. Moreover, the implications of *denying* it are worse by far for Christian theology than the "embarrassment," if such it is, of affirming it in a scientific and religiously pluralist context.

In my view one cannot either flatly assert the virgin conception as an established genetic and physiological fact, or flatly deny it on genetic and physiological grounds, because the relevant, scientifically controllable evidence is not available to be examined, and never will be. The only possibilities that are open to us are to grant marginal control to the scientific unlikelihood, or to allow marginal control to the confession of faith.

Which one will do is not simply a matter of fideistic or rationalistic decision, as though there were no other criterion. I believe some rational controls are placed on who or what we believe God is, and how we find out what we think we know about God and his dealings with the world. In the Christian tradition, this means asking how we weigh "natural" and "special" revelation, and how we suppose we ought to evaluate them using our human capacity for rationality (on the status of which we may also hold varying opinions). I affirm this doctrine and insist that Christians must not deny it, not because I think I am able to answer unanswerable questions about Mary's body, but because the doctrine is functioning in a certain way in the web of Christian beliefs. The Bible seems to think of itself as reporting straightforwardly on the facts about the relationship between Mary and Joseph, and about Jesus's conception, but it shows no anxiety or apprehensiveness about the issues that arise for us when we think to ask about that relationship and its bodily implications apart from the report.

The doctrine of virgin conception, or as the creeds put it less technically, virgin birth, is, then, less a statement about Mary than it is a statement about Jesus Christ. As such it is one element in the Christology or Christologies of the New Testament, that Jesus Christ is, first, *truly God* (in whatever way the Father is God), because conceived by the Holy Spirit in a woman whose pregnancy is otherwise inexplicable; second, that he is *truly human* (in whatever way we are human, except for sin), because he was carried by and born to a human mother; and third, he is, nevertheless, a single integrated person. Most importantly, seen against the background of the ancient (as well as modern)

understanding that births to virgins do not happen, it depicts the conviction of the apostles that the incarnation, the embodiment of God in a particular human life, is a unique, history-transforming event, utterly without analogy, otherwise unexampled in human history and experience. When we confess this clause in a creed, we are saying something, not so much about Mary, about whom we can know very little that is relevant to decide the question, but rather about the mighty act of God in Jesus Christ.

Likewise, questions about whether and how this could be credible in a post-modern, scientific world also miss the point. The first question, *whether* it is credible, is empirically testable, and the flat assertion that it is not credible is empirically falsifiable. It seems to me that in many American cities, hosts of intelligent, well educated, thoroughly modern people are finding the basic questions of life more intelligently answered in the most conservative churches than in any other framework or institution with which they have been involved. That is to say, an even more traditional version of Christian theology than I have defended here, to say nothing of Peacocke's, is in empirical fact successfully appealing to, being credible to and believed by, large numbers of people who live every day in an educated, scientific world. Many people in that world are skeptical about the Christian faith, but they doubt not so much what we believe as our seriousness and integrity in believing it. They tend to think we are hypocrites, rather than dupes. What we need in order to make Christian faith credible in the modern world, rather than a faith defined down to a "believable" but not very substantial core, is to show in our lives what we mean by what we say in our special language and practices.

This doctrine is always going to be an issue in Christian theology. Its innate problems will always raise questions. At the same time, though, it is precisely the recognition that Jesus Christ is uniquely God living a particular human life that is the meaning of the doctrine of virgin conception from the New Testament forward. The ground for the most prominent and intuitive objection, which Peacocke states so clearly, turns out to be identical or almost so with the theoretical grounds for the Christian affirmation of the doctrine: it indicates that Jesus Christ is fully human, and yet he is also the appearance in creation of the Creator, and God's presence in Jesus Christ is without analogy among the natural facts and phenomena of creation.

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# Contract Theory and Human Sexuality

JAMES W. MILLER

The ongoing debate over the nature, structure, and social legitimacy of homosexual behavior has taken a number of different forms since it first gained substantial attention in public discourse in the 1950's.<sup>1</sup> Geneticists explore the biological core of our sexuality, while sociologists dissect its modes of transmission from generation to generation. Exegetes trace its doctrinal and cultural roots, while pastors attempt to sort through the cacophony of conflicting voices to address the immediate needs of parishioners who find themselves trapped between the realities of homosexuality and stigmatization. In the midst of the debate, we are being forced to search our moral structures to their foundations, testing their solidity and applicability. While no single survey can exhaust this breadth of issues, one can plausibly investigate the key moral foundations which have led to the revision of traditionally Christian views on homosexuality. This essay, then, will focus particularly on the influence of contract theory, dissect its proponents, and project its consequences on family structures.

As contract theory and the economics of individualism have come to bear on the debate over human sexuality, understandings of covenant are being revised. If the church glances back over its shoulder as it adjudicates in such matters, it will find itself courting the proponents of contract theory. Posner, for instance, has challenged the legal system to acknowledge and reassess its arbitrary and biased rulings in this area, favoring a libertarian model of litigation. Foucault portrays the ethic of self-interest as a more realistic manifestation of humanity and sexuality. These are the forebears of predominant, current methodologies. Of more grave concern than its hindsight, when the church foresees the logical consequences of such methodology, it realistically must prepare to sustain an entire revolution of family structures. By contrast, biblical<sup>2</sup> and Barthian notions of covenant pose a more stable basis for the family systems that are inherent in human civilizations.

A word on words: much effort has been made to sensi-

tize the participants of the debate. We have been warned not to lose sight of the individuals who are personally involved in the consequences of our cognitive explorations,<sup>3</sup> asked to drop the psychiatric term "homosexual" for the self-assigned term "gay,"<sup>4</sup> and reminded that terminology of "natural" and "unnatural" are

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fundamentally value-laden.<sup>5</sup> In the midst of pleas for civility, loose rhetoric has also filled more than a few pages.<sup>6</sup> In an attempt to respect the constituents and their viewpoints, I have chosen to adopt the most common terminology of "homosexuality" and "same-sex relations," acknowledging its tenuity, because to date it most simply describes the biological reality of the matters under discussion.

There is no easy way to sift through the camps of the multi-faceted debate to reach its moral foundations. All sides claim a basis in Scripture.<sup>7</sup> Nonetheless, it is impor-

**James Miller** is a pastor in San Pedro, California, and a graduate of Princeton Theological Seminary.

<sup>1</sup>One need only consider the diversity of C.L. Seow's *Homosexuality and Christian Community* to see that one subject at one academic institution can produce at least a dozen methods and conclusions.

<sup>2</sup>Note that while I will not zealously label one position in the homosexuality debate "biblical," theories of covenant certainly may be more or less so.

<sup>3</sup>T.E. Schmidt, *Straight and Narrow? Compassion and Clarity in the Homosexuality Debate*, (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 1995) 176-80.

<sup>4</sup>J. Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980) 41-5.

<sup>5</sup>P. Pronk, *Against Nature? Types of Moral Argumentation Regarding Homosexuality*, (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1993) 14.

<sup>6</sup>Note the provocative title, *Heterosexism*, by P. Jung and R.F. Smith, to suggest that their opponents lack all validity and are severely prejudiced.

<sup>7</sup>See the face off of biblical scholars in C.L. Seow, ed. *Homosexuality and Christian Community*, (Louisville:



tant to remember that the debate being waged was not opened by a re-examination of the Scriptures, but by a pastoral dilemma over the care of well-meaning, Christian individuals who found themselves with same-sex desires.<sup>8</sup> Exegetical debate ensued. The questions preceded the voice of the biblical texts, and subsequent revisions have failed to substantially undermine the their unanimous proclamation.<sup>9</sup>

Geneticists and sociologists similarly wrestle with the probable causes of same-sex desire and their implications for moral reasoning. It must readily be admitted that biological drives and inclinations, which, as yet, have not been proven to be the source of same-sex behavior, are no basis for morality. To argue such creates what Pronk calls "the naturalistic fallacy," errantly assuming that biology implies moral necessity.<sup>10</sup> One can no sooner say that a so-called "gay gene" provides a moral basis for homosexual behavior than one can say that the many human drives are equally permissible. Furthermore, such genetic isolation simply makes room for engineering.<sup>11</sup> On the other hand, one also may not claim that the basic physiology of the male-female fit is a definitive basis for moral norms. In either case, moral foundations surpass biological determinism. In the realm of sociology, the possibility of socialized sex roles again leaves room for the possibility of the manipulation of human inclinations.<sup>12</sup> Many predilections and drives of human beings, all quite unchosen, are nonetheless insubstantial in the realm of ethics. Moral reasoning must find its basis elsewhere.

At the core of the proposed revisions of the traditionally Christian view of homosexuality lies a moral understanding of human relations. In Posner's paraphrase of John Stuart Mill's philosophy,

"Libertarianism . . . can be summed up in seven words: 'Your rights end where his nose begins.' Government interference with adult consensual activities is unjustified unless it can be shown to be necessary for the protection of the liberty or property of other persons."<sup>13</sup>

The prevailing contemporary ethos (which substitutes "church" for "government" in this citation) dictates a contract theory of human relations. Roughly stated, mutual consent and individual discernment (with proprietous reflection on the Scriptures), checked by a simplistic harm

Westminster/John Knox Press, 1996). Therein, Mauser and Gillespie find NT texts reflective of a creative order, while Seow, Miller, and Adam find variant themes within the texts, permitting flexibility.

<sup>8</sup>Pronk, 44.

<sup>9</sup>This is certainly a debate all its own whose recapitulation brevity prohibits. Schmidt exhaustively reports the debate. A telling example of strained revision is Boswell's interpretation of Romans 1 (Boswell, 107-110), and Hays' subsequent critique.

<sup>10</sup>Pronk 14-15, 47, 212.

<sup>11</sup>M.L. Stackhouse, "The Heterosexual Norm," *Homosexuality*, Seow, ed., 136.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid. 136-7.

<sup>13</sup>R.A. Posner, *Sex and Reason*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992) 3.

principle, are the only sufficient and necessary grounds for moral decision-making.

This vantage point finds proponents in the realms of legal debate (Posner), theories on sexuality (Foucault), and liberation theology (Boswell, Siker, P. Jung & Smith), each to be evaluated. Contract theory serves to accommodate the needs of a pluralistic society by permitting broad freedom within the bounds of others' rights. It's intentions are compassionate. Its ends are chaotic.

From the legal perspective, Posner re-examines the irregular legislation concerning sexuality<sup>14</sup> and advocates a more broadly accepting policy. He posits an economic model of sexual behavior, such that the biology of sexuality is constrained by costs and opportunities.<sup>15</sup> Frequent opportunities for any chosen pattern of behavior will lower the costs necessary for people to attain their desired goal, easing societal tensions. Costs of a search can increase irregular behavior and exact tolls on a society. Thus, for instance, if it becomes difficult for men to find female sexual partners, instances of homosexual behavior will increase.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, the male/female ratio, urbanization and larger populations, income, and religiosity may all factor into the frequency of homosexual behavior.<sup>17</sup> (There is, he concedes, a difference between this kind of "opportunistic" homosexual behavior, and that which is so-called "genetic."<sup>18</sup>) When these factors create higher costs for individuals in their search for sexual satisfaction, society suffers a consequent tension. Therefore, he argues, it is best for government to maximize opportunity and minimize costs necessary for individuals to pursue their ends, so long as they not hinder the property or liberty of others. In so arguing, Posner has set the stage for a rational-choice, economic theory of sexuality.<sup>19</sup>

Three drawbacks to Posner's methodology immediately surface. First, he relies upon Kinsey's studies (1948/53), which he claims have been "corroborated" and are "generally accurate," despite criticisms of which he is aware.<sup>20</sup> While Kinsey may well offer provocative initiative into such studies, his data has been more than questioned.<sup>21</sup> Second, Posner operates with the presumption that people count the costs and profits of sex and family before making invest-

<sup>14</sup>Posner 72-5. Here he graphs various infringements and the wide range of punishments enacted by different cultures for the same sexual deviancies.

<sup>15</sup>Posner, 111-15.

<sup>16</sup>Posner, 119-124.

<sup>17</sup>Posner, 127-41.

<sup>18</sup>Posner, 105.

<sup>19</sup>Posner, 110.

<sup>20</sup>Posner, 18.

<sup>21</sup>E.O. Lauman, et al. *The Social Organization of Sexuality*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994) 35, 289. More specifically, Kinsey drew subjects from reform schools, prisons, and homosexual networks to arrive at the inflated figure of a 10% rate of homosexuals in the population. Such data was then distributed popularly to society as late as 1978 in Scanzoni's *Is the Homosexual my Neighbor*, which calculates, using this data, how many homosexuals plausibly attend any given church.



ments.<sup>22</sup> Yet assuming that the founding of human relations, sexual or otherwise, rests on calculating self-interest is simply an inadequate anthropology. The household as the historical foundation of human relations does not derive from a modern "singles bar mentality."<sup>23</sup> Both religious tradition and historical practice indicate that there is "an onto-theological order that everyone almost knows."<sup>24</sup> Third, Posner offers an undeveloped history of family. What ancient Greece held normal was suppressed by a tyrannical Christianity, only to be revived in modern Sweden.<sup>25</sup> More thorough accounts of the development of family systems with proper attention to the role of religiosity are available.<sup>26</sup>

Despite its methodological flaws, this is Posner's moral vantage point. He argues for legal accommodation of changing trends to decrease opportunity costs and consequent stress on society. The ramifications of this perspective on family systems we will see shortly, but first there are two remaining realms in which similar moral foundations are employed to like ends.

Revisions to the traditionally Christian standpoint on homosexual behavior also appear in the realm of theories on sexuality. Here Foucault is the chief proponent. With Rousseau-like glorification of humanity in its "natural" state, following its inclinations without repressive constraint, Foucault charts the history of dogmatism in issues of sexuality.<sup>27</sup> Sex is channeled through loci of power that disseminate knowledge and control discourse. Organic and free expression and practice of sexuality, he claims, was first undermined by the inquisition of the confessional and later by the proliferation and categorization of discourse on sexuality by modern science, a "systematic blindness."<sup>28</sup> He in turn wants to categorize and analyze (and ultimately destabilize) the systems of power that have controlled sexuality.<sup>29</sup> His stated goal is:

... to speak out against the powers that be, to utter truths and promise bliss, to link together enlightenment, liberation, and manifold pleasures; to pronounce a discourse that combines the fervor of knowledge, the determination to change the laws, and the longing for the garden of earthly delights.<sup>30</sup>

This, again, is an implied proposal to return to contract as the foundation of moral theory.

Unfortunately, as Stackhouse chastises, "Many who

think they are liberated are merely unzipped."<sup>31</sup> Foucault's plans for a re-evaluation of sexuality combine not only enlightenment, liberation, and pleasure, but also a questionable historical account, a reckless and shortsighted freedom, and biased motivations. First, his historical record denies any innate propensity to monogamous, heterosexual family without governmental intervention, despite the fact that institutions that destabilize family structures historically have been distrusted and self-destructive.<sup>32</sup> Second, Foucault poses not simply as an unaffected researcher, but as a passionate advocate, and while this does not exclude his voice, it certainly qualifies it. The ramifications of such a shortsighted advocacy will soon be addressed.

Finally, revisionist views on homosexuality arise within the realm of liberation theology. The United Church of Christ became the first mainline, Protestant denomination in the United States to publicly ordain a professed, practicing homosexual, Bill Johnson, in 1972. This was done under the auspices of prophetic indignation towards the oppression of minority groups. As the argument goes, first women, then African-Americans, and finally homosexuals. Those within the Christian churches who struggle for the blessing of homosexual unions by church and state insist that Jesus' message involved radical inclusivity of all people. While this does not sanction all behavior, the well-intended decisions made by mutually consenting adults are theirs to make (i.e. contract theory). Just as the Gentiles were included into the early church, so homosexuals are to be included in ours.<sup>33</sup> (One wonders why early Christian ecumenism is accepted as authoritative while their understanding of sexuality is not.) Oppression of homosexuals, Boswell argues, was a later development in the church that followed the rise of asceticism and supported dominant power structures.<sup>34</sup> The most forceful presentation of this perspective comes from P.B. Jung and R.F. Smith.<sup>35</sup> They argue that the maintenance of a heterosexual norm is based on nothing more than "heterosexism," a philosophically unsound, biblically unfounded prejudice, coupled with unchecked fear of diversity.

Posner and Foucault have erred methodologically and pragmatically. An inadequate account of the history of family systems has lead to a shortsighted projection of the consequences of their proposals. With Jung and Smith the mistake is repeated, but with an additional theological concern. They simply relinquish responsibility for the ramifications of their views, claiming that because we have no models of socially acceptable same-sex relations, we have no way of

<sup>22</sup>M.L. Stackhouse, *Covenant and Commitments: Faith, Family, and Economic Life*, (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1997) 57.

<sup>23</sup>Stackhouse, 62.

<sup>24</sup>Stackhouse, 22.

<sup>25</sup>Posner, 146-180.

<sup>26</sup>Stackhouse, 75ff.

<sup>27</sup>M. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, v.1. (New York: Random House, 1978).

<sup>28</sup>Foucault, 55.

<sup>29</sup>Foucault, 90ff.

<sup>30</sup>Foucault, 7.

<sup>31</sup>Stackhouse, 35, included in draft.

<sup>32</sup>Stackhouse, 104.

<sup>33</sup>J.S. Siker, "How To Decide? Homosexual Christians, the Bible, and Gentile Inclusion," *Theology Today*, 51 (1994): 219-34. Also see the rebuttal in C.R. Seitz, "Human Sexuality: Viewed from the Bible's Understanding of the Human Condition," *Theology Today*, 52 (1995): 236-46.

<sup>34</sup>Boswell, 333, 32.

<sup>35</sup>P.B. Jung and R.F. Smith, *Heterosexism: an Ethical Challenge*, (New York: State University of New York Press, 1993).



knowing what its consequences might be.<sup>36</sup> Worse still, they offer absolutely no account of family systems and hope only that acceptance will provide a more loving model for heterosexual couples.<sup>37</sup> Yet liberation from one social system without a well-articulated and calculated segue to another ends not in freedom but in the shackles of disorder. I would propose, in response, to flesh out the consequences of contract theory on family structures.

Assuming the full granting of the cause of homosexual advocates, social, legal, and ecclesiastical blessing, are there no means to project the consequences on family systems? Such a claim is simply naive. Visions of the utopian co-existence of strong heterosexual and homosexual families have not come to pass in more inclusive Scandinavian countries. Where family systems have been revised, family systems have decayed. The result is not coincidental. To uproot the philosophical moorings of family and replace them with contractual arrangements undermines the obligation to and opportunity of family. Just as opportunities and constraints affect the choices available to a population,<sup>38</sup> so family directly affects and is affected by the political and economic order.<sup>39</sup> Economic models of sexuality that are not conducive to family do not merely enhance variety, they destabilize the norm.

The data is not unavailable. Posner draws on studies of Swedish culture, its ethical flexibility and the consequences for family structure.<sup>40</sup> He portrays the development of sexual morality through three stages: the woman as breeder, the woman as companion, and finally the woman as a member of egalitarian relations. This third, market-oriented stage of evolution is found in Sweden and is characterized by vast sexual liberty. This is the mature contract theory, where men and women alike invest in their chosen relations as it serves their self-interest. Optimal regulation of sexuality must then cater to this final stage of development and respond with the inclusion of diverse sexual expressions, including homosexuality, co-habitation, and early engagement in sex by youth. This, of course, decreases the obligation to companionate marriage and thus to traditional, heterosexual, monogamous, child-rearing models of family.

The results of such revisions on family and the society which does (or does not) support it are tremendous. Jung and Smith cannot safely claim an absence of data for calculating consequences. Shifts in the philosophical paradigm for family structures and consequent economic manipulation of resources available to families have occurred in various ways. The consequences have been dire. Popenoe's collection of essays, part of the Don Browning Project, addresses the decline of marriage and family systems in the United States, the rise of divorce, the absence of father-figures, etc.

due to such a paradigm shift.<sup>41</sup> Perhaps sixty percent of all children born in the 1980's will experience the divorce of their parents in their lifetimes, largely thanks to the rise in voluntary family disruption since the 1960's.<sup>42</sup> Note that advocates of no-fault divorce, with probable good intentions, paved the way for disinvestment in these now contractual relationships. Family itself was not attacked, but systems that supported it were relativized. A crack in the foundation, without visible strain on the house, endangers its stability. "It is likely," Stackhouse says, "that the stresses we feel in our society are influenced by the fact that these developments have threatened . . . the family. And people do not trust programs that do not support families."<sup>43</sup>

Further and more extreme consequences are probable. The relativization of sexual practices through the embrace of diversity has courted lifestyles heretofore unaccepted in the mainstream of the United States. Foucault advocates more impulsive sexual expression, with open denigration of the first legal stipulations against pedophilia in French law.<sup>44</sup> He mocks "the pettiness of it all; the fact that this everyday occurrence in the life of village sexuality . . . could become . . . the object not only of a collective intolerance but of a judicial action . . ."<sup>45</sup> Posner offers a more nuanced echo, recommending decreasing the legal age for sexual relations to fifteen, as do the Swedes, and thus eliminating most cases of pedasty (by definition, not cessation).<sup>46</sup> Another and still more plausible step extends sexual freedom to the polygamous. While the U.S. has previously denied protection of religious freedom to polygamy (1878 Reynolds vs. U.S.), modern revision of sexual expression, with philosophical foundations in contract theory, cannot rationally deny extension of this schema to multiple partnerships. I see no need here to offer judgment on these eventualities.

In addition to the destabilization of family structures and the increased probability of unbounded sexual license, there are final ends in the reshaping of the moral decision-making of society. While detailed prognosis would be zealous, general trends of the logical consequences can be traced. Jung and Smith admit the possibility of relativism, a final step they are not willing to conclude, despite their assurance that homosexual couples will provide an ethic of love for society.<sup>47</sup> Pronk concludes anti-climactically that moral reasoning rests on little more than deliberation in community,<sup>48</sup> an unfortunate default that rapidly ushers in the nihilism of group will.<sup>49</sup> While the prevailing moral climate is shaped by various factors, tampering with family, one of

<sup>41</sup>D. Popenoe, et al, ed. *Promises to Keep*, (Lanham, Md: Rowman and Littlefield Pub. Inc., 1996).

<sup>42</sup>Whitehead, B.D. "The Decline of Marriage as the Social Basis of Childrearing," *Promises to Keep*, Popenoe, ed., 4. Also therein see M.C. Regan, Jr.'s analysis of the structuring of a contextual identity and the benefits of fault divorces.

<sup>43</sup>Stackhouse, 104.

<sup>44</sup>Foucault, 27-31.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid.

<sup>46</sup>Posner, 403.

<sup>47</sup>P.B. Jung and R.F. Smith, 103, 92, 97, 99.

<sup>48</sup>Pronk, 323.

<sup>49</sup>Stackhouse, 40.

<sup>36</sup>P.B. Jung and R.F. Smith, 103.

<sup>37</sup>P.B. Jung and R.F. Smith, 90ff.

<sup>38</sup>This, again, is Posner's contention, although used to a different end.

<sup>39</sup>Stackhouse 44-6, 75ff. Stackhouse notes a complex web of values manifesting themselves in habits of gift-giving, home-making, and planning for the next generation. The value of family is not simply a contract of calculated self-interest.

<sup>40</sup>Posner 146-80, 214ff.



its cornerstones, has clear ramifications on the structure of society.

In turn, the traditionally Christian understanding that homosexual behavior is neither ontologically necessary nor theologically sanctioned finds its roots in biblical models of covenant, altogether different from contract theory. Here man and woman are bound together in complementary otherness, such that they as engendered beings in relation to the Absolute have no license to contract their sexuality nor any other part of their personhood in ways that do not correspond to the created order or the Creator's covenantal relations with humanity. Every part of the creature's being is to reflect the transcendent other, covenanted in a love whose specificity lies in its essence.

Rivalry over theological grounding has taken a faulty and incomplete course. It can easily be asserted that various factions find their grounding in Scripture and theological rationale. What is not quite so certain is whether exegetical methodology leans expository or skeptical. That is, the inclination of the debate towards the few texts specifically addressing homosexual behavior and the barrage of epistemic challenges to them is altogether misleading.<sup>50</sup> It springs not so much from thorough exposition of biblical texts (or even the appeal to thematic deference<sup>51</sup>) but from intentions of expanding hermeneutical quandaries to serve dogmatic ends. Biblical images of covenant, family, and gender, the properly central texts for the foundations of a sexual ethic, in no way support the revision of texts addressing homosexual behavior.<sup>52</sup>

Brevity does not allow for a full dissection of the theological and biblical grounding of contract theory. Nonetheless, the positive correlation between covenantal theory and homosexuality should pose a challenge. The ancestral, Levitical, and Pauline injunctions against homosexuality do not reflect the independent themes of civility, holiness, and (depending on who you ask) pederasty, confused orientation, or paganism.<sup>53</sup> Instead, the sexual ethics of the Old and New Testaments are bound to the one common theme of covenantal relationships grounded in the created order.<sup>54</sup> God created them male and female, and that paradigmatic relationship rests on and reflects the covenant of Creator and creature in the call to faithfulness (esp. Hos., Is., Gal.).

Barth has properly located the grounding of sexuality in the biblical covenant. Jesus Christ, as the image of God, embodies true humanity in relation to God, an I in perfect fellowship with the Thou.<sup>55</sup> The grounding of humanity,

then, is not in our capability to love or to form loving covenants, but in the event of perpetual fellowship with God. Humanity is not achieved in contract it is a "fellow-humanity" grounded in God's will.<sup>56</sup> Barth draws three conclusions which have ramifications specifically for human sexuality.<sup>57</sup> First, humanity is determined by its created essence, limited by its ontological being established by the divine. We cannot defy God's intentions to create contracts, sexual or otherwise, more suitable to our own will. Second, humanity is created in reciprocal relations. We cannot form contracts that neglect our obligation to community. Third,

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it is an essence that is also one with one other, a "genuine duality." We relate as unique people, not in masses alone. The basic essence of humanity is being in relation to God and another, based on the biblical model of the covenant between God and humanity.

This comes to bear on the homosexuality debate as Barth describes the specificity of humanity in relation. It is, specifically, the relation of man to woman, woman to man.<sup>58</sup> Just as the Old Testament holds male-female marriage to correspond to the relationship between Yahweh and his people, so in the New it is a parallel to the relation of Jesus and his community.<sup>59</sup> God's relation to humanity is a relation of otherness, pointing directly to the differentiation in relationship. With full acknowledgment that a same-sex couple may have elements of beauty and spirituality,<sup>60</sup> Barth nonetheless maintains that it cannot embody the structural and functional distinction of man and woman.<sup>61</sup> Sexuality itself cannot be assumed to be a center of attention on which humanity can rule intuitively; it can only be understood in perspective of the theological center of

<sup>50</sup>I am here indebted to Rev. Dr. Gary Deddo for his counsel.

<sup>51</sup>Miller, P.D. "What the Scriptures Principally Teach," *Homosexuality and Christian Community*, Seow, C.L. ed. 53-63. Recall the debate was not originally exegetical.

<sup>52</sup>Also see the essays of Gillespie, Mauser, and Stackhouse in Seow, ed.

<sup>53</sup>For these interpretations of Paul see Boswell (107ff.), Scroggs (cited in Schmidt 95), and Pronk (273ff.) respectively.

<sup>54</sup>Schmidt 65-8, 85. Schmidt presents the most detailed review of the exegetical debate to date (64-85).

<sup>55</sup>K. Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (3/2), Bromiley, Torrance, ed. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994) 222. Also cf. Barth, *CD*

(3/2), 250-274, for a more full account of humanity's being-in-relation.

<sup>56</sup>Barth, *CD* (3/2), 223.

<sup>57</sup>Barth, *CD* (3/2), 243.

<sup>58</sup>Barth, *CD* (3/4), 116-19, 165-6.

<sup>59</sup>Barth, *CD* (3/4), 117.

<sup>60</sup>Barth, *CD* (3/4), 166.

<sup>61</sup>Barth, *CD* (3/4), 117.



the divine command. This command stipulates a representation of divine-human otherness in male-female reciprocity. Stackhouse, as a modern proponent of Barth's theological anthropology, repeats "we require the 'other' to be whole."<sup>62</sup> Humanity is grounded in a divinely ordained essence which reflects the relational nature of the Other which created it. Our gender, then, is not a tool of our will with which to make contracts, no matter how loving.

Covenant, therefore, as over and opposed to contract, finds theological warrant more accurately drawn from faithful exegesis of the Scriptures. If this is the ground for refusing ecclesiastical blessing of the homosexual union, we may, in turn, project its consequences on family structures. There are primarily three. The foundation for human relations in covenantal otherness according to the command of God allows for the maintenance of structures inherent throughout human civilization, provides opportunity for procreation and regeneration of the species, and maintains the ontological structure of human relations.

First, human history has always maintained a prevalent connection to the male-female family unit.<sup>63</sup> Any intentions of reducing sexuality to a construction outside of the family unit is "extremely shallow" and lacks adequate attention to the history of family.<sup>64</sup> Modern cultures which have attempted to merge a contractual model of family relations with a traditional view have not found peaceful co-existence, but a gradual weakening of the latter.<sup>65</sup> It is the case that "civilization needs certain institutions to exist."<sup>66</sup> When society has failed to support these institutions, the results have been disastrous.<sup>67</sup>

Likewise, procreation is an essential element of human civilization. One need not argue that all human couples must procreate, nor does this exclude the place of celibacy. However, when society corporately denies the primacy of family relations that provide for the coming generations, it finds itself populated with disinvested parents. Parental families provide a context of nurture for succeeding generations.<sup>68</sup> Covenantal relationships of the theological model maintain such obligation within a society, while contractual models merely create options that devalue the covenantal imperative.

Finally, again, the covenantal model of male-female family relations most integrously models the divine-human covenant. When we affirm that we are God's, no part of the human being, gender or relationship, may be employed as a tool in which to make self-fulfilling contracts. All is to reflect its Maker. The command of God, reflected both in Scriptural rejection of homosexuality and its affirmation of

the heterosexual norm, demands covenantal relations that reflect the pairing of divine and human in relational otherness. This is fulfilled in the coming together of male and female, distinction united in one flesh.

We may grant that mature, Christian people can form loving bonds that in many ways resemble heterosexual pairs. We cannot grant that these adequately reflect God's relation to humanity or sustain the family unit in society. They are, fundamentally, founded on contract rather than covenant, and contract theory ushers in a moral relativity that has always been, and will always be, detrimental to families.

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<sup>62</sup>Stackhouse, "The Heterosexual Norm," *Homosexuality and Christian Community*, Seow, ed., 141.

<sup>63</sup>Stackhouse, 75-104.

<sup>64</sup>Stackhouse, 79.

<sup>65</sup>Posner, 146-80.

<sup>66</sup>Stackhouse, "The Heterosexual Norm," *Homosexuality and Christian Community*, Seow, ed. 141.

<sup>67</sup>Stackhouse, 53-6. Stackhouse cites examples from Babylon, Egypt, India, and China.

<sup>68</sup>Stackhouse, "The Heterosexual Norm," *Homosexuality and Christian Community*, Seow, ed. 140.



# Book Reviews

## *Spiritual Theology: The Theology of Yesterday for Spiritual Help Today*

- by Diogenes Allen (Boston, MA: Cowley Publications, 1997). 169 pp., \$10.75 (pbk).

Reviewed by James McCullough

The contents of Dr. Diogenes Allen's recent book, *Spiritual Theology* (Cowley Pub., 1997), lie between two points of contemporary incredulity. On one side "it seems absurd to mention in a normal social setting that people do have a *spiritual condition*" (p. 1). On the other is the notion that Christian doctrines are actually helpful *because they are true* (p. 159). It should be noted that the astonished incredulity in the latter instance is not that of fashionable secular society, but of many members in modern churches.

The aim of *Spiritual Theology* is to address these two points of contemporary incredulity by applying the resources of Christian theology, especially as elucidated in the patristic era, to the perennial issues of human spirituality.

***While it may be easy to read, it is not always comfortable to read.***

Because it is a book of spiritual theology, it is a book of systematic knowledge. Rather than "how to" it focuses on "what are" the insights of those "spiritual theologians," insights which can still be appropriated, with great effectiveness, today.

"The goal of the Christian life - both in this world and the world to come - is union with God" (p. 149). Spiritual theology is that body of accumulated Christian doctrine and insight into how that goal is properly achieved, and how such "union" or fellowship with God can be developed and enjoyed.

Written in a very readable style, *Spiritual Theology* introduces the reader to the stories well known, and not so well known, of Christian personalities and their encounters with God. But while it may be easy to read, it is not always comfortable to read. Struggles of the inner life are exposed and named; the "Eight Deadly Thoughts" are brought into clear analysis. Yet the diagnosis is given with a remedial

intention:

Because human sinfulness has clouded our hearts and minds, receiving God's revelation requires repentance; an increase in our understanding of God's revelation requires continuing spiritual growth. That is why intellectual inquiry cannot be *detached* inquiry, and why Julian of Norwich compared the knowledge of God to three wounds: the wound of contrition (repentance); the wound of compassion (love of neighbor); and the wound of longing (love for God). (p. 153).

Points of particular personal interest were:

- The theme of the interrelated dynamic of knowing and loving God; that growing in the *knowledge of God* is meant to cultivate one's *love for God*. A good thing to remember during seminary.
- The value of *contemplation*, of the disciplined development of paying *attention*, and of engagement in serious *thinking*.
- The enlightening function of Christian doctrine; that the doctrines of creation, incarnation, Trinity, and such, practically help us "because they cast light on the things of this world, they increase our understanding of God, our world, and ourselves" (p. 61).

Besides serving as an excellent introduction to the origins and contours of classic spiritual theology, Dr. Allen's book might also serve as a creative introduction to Christianity for the spiritually searching skeptic. More than revivalistic fervor or monotonous religious observation, Christianity is an integrative worldview that provides insight into the nature of things, which can in turn provide organizing principals for one's own life. Thus, one's neglected *spiritual condition* can be reformed on the basis of something that is *true*. For some people at least, this would be very Good News.

The book, however, is aimed primarily at a Christian audience, and well it should be. The need of the hour in the American church is for leaders who are people of depth. Depth is the result of an intentionally cultivated relationship with God. In this regard, Dr. Allen's book is a wonderful encouragement, and a persuasive invitation to appropriate our historic spiritual heritage in our own day.

James McCullough is an M.Div. Junior at Princeton Theological Seminary.



***What Saint Paul Really Said: Was Paul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity?***

- by N. T. Wright (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), 192 pp., \$14.00 (pbk).

*Reviewed by William L. W. Pinches*

This book is, in large part, a compendium of lectures pertaining to "some key areas of Paul's proclamation and its implications" (p. 8) given by N. T. Wright at various places over the past several years. The introductory chapter reviews the history of Pauline scholarship in the twentieth century, emphasizing the contributions of Schweitzer, Bultmann, Davies, Käsemann, and Sanders. He categorizes the various questions asked about Paul under four headings: history, theology, exegesis, and application. The second chapter tries to describe what Paul may have been like prior to his conversion, and the immediate significance of his conversion. Five chapters explore various aspects of Paul's theology, including the significance of the "gospel" for Paul, Jesus within Paul's monotheism, the shape of Paul's mission to the Gentiles (whom Wright consistently calls "the pagans"), the righteousness of God, justification, and the renewed humanity. The ninth chapter turns to matters of application for the contemporary world.

The book was nearing completion when Wright received a new book by A. N. Wilson (see PTR vol. 4, no. 3), which argues, according to Wright, "that Paul was the real founder of Christianity, misrepresenting Jesus and inventing a theology in which a 'Christ' figure, which had nothing really to do with the Jesus of history, becomes central" (p. 8). The final chapter of Wright's book is a response to Wilson's book. The subtitle of Wright's book and the brief description on the back cover suggest that the *whole* book is a response to Wilson's argument, but that is by no means the case: the only extended discussion of Wilson's argument appears in the concluding chapter. Indeed, the question whether Paul was the "real founder of Christianity" is only addressed directly in the final five pages.

The primary title of the book, "What Saint Paul Really Said," is also misleading. One could try to determine what words Paul might actually have said, in much the same way that some scholars do with Jesus, using data from Acts, some apocryphal literature, and whatever comments Paul himself makes about things he *said* in particular circumstances (cf. 1 Cor. 2:1-5), but this is not the Wright's task. We could restrict "what Saint Paul really said" to the sub-category "what Saint Paul really said in writing," but strictly speaking this project would fall under the domain of textual criticism, debates about the authenticity of the letters attributed to Paul, and (potentially) archaeology, should a document be unearthed that might be claimed to stem from Paul's pen. This is not Wright's project either. A somewhat better title for Wright's book might be "What Saint Paul Really Thought," since for the most part Wright is dealing with Paul's theology. Even more appropriate titles might be "Essays on Paul" or (following Nils Dahl) "Studies on Paul." In any event, the title is misleading, and the subtitle seems to have been chosen for purely

sensationalist purposes. The effect is to hide a respectable contribution to Pauline scholarship under the equivalent of a tabloid headline.

There is much to be commended in the book, once one gets past the title. Wright's style of writing is consistently readable and occasionally quite stimulating. The first chapter nicely sets the stage for the theological discussions to follow, and later in the book he continually refers to the scholars whose work he treats in that chapter. The theological exegesis is generally very sound throughout the book, and he proves adept in marshaling texts from Paul's letters to support his arguments. His critique of Wilson's argument in the final chapter seems to this reviewer to be thorough and fair, demonstrating points of continuity between Jesus and Paul and helping the reader to move beyond the naive concept that Christianity had a "founder" at all, since it emerged out of a very diverse Judaism and only became a distinct religion in a subsequent period.

Chapter 3, entitled, "Herald of the King," is particularly impressive. It articulates what Paul may have meant when referring to "the gospel" (e.g., Rom. 1:1), first exploring passages from the Greek text of Isaiah (40:9 and 52:7) which use the same noun or the related verb, then considering the

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usage of the word in the Greek world, and then discussing Paul's usage of the word. Wright emphasizes the central importance of the crucifixion of Jesus, the significance of Jesus' resurrection, the meaning of Paul's identification of Jesus as "the Christ," and Paul's assertion that Jesus is Lord. In each of these areas, Wright is right on target. He is right that "the shameful death of Jesus at the hands of the pagans was, for Paul, the centre and starting point of what 'the gospel' was all about" (p. 49). He is also right to connect Paul's identification of Jesus as "son of God" with passages in the scriptures that identify the king as God's son (2 Sam. 7; Pss. 2; 89). He argues that Paul viewed Jesus as king, and despite the fact that this claim is controversial within New Testament scholarship he manages to make a strong and rather convincing case.

The following chapter is not as convincing. Here Wright examines Jewish monotheism, and explores how Jesus fits into Paul's Jewish monotheism. He argues that Paul viewed Jesus as divine, that for Paul "at the heart of



Jewish monotheism—within the oneness of the one God—lay a plurality, a reciprocal relationship” (pp. 71-72). The keys for Wright’s argument lie in 1 Cor. 8:1-6 (quoting Deut. 6:4), Phil. 2:5-11 (quoting Isa. 45:23), and Col. 1:15-20, along with Rom. 10:13 (quoting Joel 2:32 [=3:5 in Greek]) and Rom. 9:5. There are a few problems here. While some Pauline scholars, including Wright, view Colossians as authentic, others do not, and it is unwise for Wright to use a passage from that letter in support of a hotly controversial topic. Rom. 9:5 is beset with translation difficulties (cf. the commentaries by C. E. B. Cranfield or J. D. G. Dunn) which Wright casually brushes aside (p. 71) without offering any substantive arguments, or even a footnote. The argument is left, then, with only 1 Cor. 8:1-6, Phil. 2:5-11, and Rom. 10:13 offering strong support, and I submit that these passages do not necessarily lead to the conclusion that Paul viewed Jesus as divine. Wright then makes a similar argument with regard to the Spirit, ultimately describing Paul as “trinitarian” (p. 73). This reviewer remains unconvinced.

One consistent problem throughout the book is a lack of documentation. Some chapters, including the chapter pertaining to the righteousness of God, have absolutely no footnotes, yet Wright consistently refers to the views of other scholars or to his own earlier writings. In the preface he says “the detailed foundations of my argument can mostly be found in my own various published writings” (p. 8) and he does offer an annotated bibliography. In my judgment, however, he owes the reader more. Perhaps those attending his lectures have an opportunity to ask questions and receive answers, but readers do not have that sort of access to the author and need to be told where they may go to find answers.

The book also seems weak on some historical matters. Based almost solely on what Paul says in Gal. 1:13-14, Wright concludes that before his conversion Paul was “one of the strictest of the strict” among the Shammaite Pharisees (p. 26), and describes at great length what “Saul” may have believed and how he may have carried out these beliefs, even comparing Saul with Yigal Amir, who shot Yitzhak Rabin in November of 1995. He does all this without explaining how he knows so much about Shammaite Pharisees or how he is certain that Paul was among them (the documentation problem again). Furthermore, he seems especially dependent upon the portrayal of Paul in Acts, referring to the stoning of Stephen, Paul’s pre-conversion name “Saul,” and the road to Damascus, none of which are mentioned by Paul. Wright is content using Acts as a historical source, despite the tensions between Paul and Acts at some points, and despite Luke’s interest in telling a good story. Wright should at least acknowledge the fact that others do not give Acts the same degree of historical reliability that he does.

Thus, in my judgment, *What Saint Paul Really Said: Was Paul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity?* has some serious weaknesses. The misleading title and lack of documentation are particularly problematic. Nevertheless, there is much of value in the book. As stated above, this reviewer found chapter three to be exceptionally good, and most of the other theological chapters are quite good as well. The critique of A. N. Wilson’s book seems right on target. It is unfortunate that the level of quality Wright demonstrates in these chapters is not consistent throughout the book, but nonetheless Wright has made an important contribution to Pauline studies.

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